

Message Text

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TRSE-00 /062 W

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5283

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FOLLOWING TELEGRAM TRANSMITTED ON BEHALF OF AMCONSUL
EDINBURGH

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, UK

SUBJECT: REFLECTIONS ON A SCOTTISH STRIKE

1. IN GLASGOW THIS WEEK I HAVE HAD OCCASION TO DISCUSS
THE CURRENT STRIKE SITUATION WITH A CROSS-SECTION OF
LEADING GLASWEGIAN OFFICIALS, INCLUDING JAMES JACK,
GENERAL SECRETARY, SCOTTISH TRADES UNION COUNCIL (STUC),
E.J.D. WARNE, DIRECTOR FOR SCOTLAND, DEPT. OF TRADE AND
INDUSTRY (DTI), HAMISH GRANT, SECRETARY, CONFEDERATION
OF BRITISH INDUSTRIES (CBI), PLUS CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE
CONSULAR AND PRESS CORPS AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.
PRINCIPAL IMPRESSIONS FOLLOW:

A. LOSS OF UNION CONTROL. THE CONSENSUS HELD
THAT UNION LEADERSHIP HAD FAILED AND THAT SHOP STEWARDS,
ANONYMOUS BY CHOICE, WERE CONTROLLING EVENTS. EVEN THE
CBI FEARED THIS LOSS OF UNION CONTROL, MUCH PREFERRING
TO NEGOTIATE WITH KNOWN AND RESPONSIBLE ADVERSARIES,
WHOSE WORD HAD IN THE PAST REFLECTED A POWER AND DIS-
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CIPLINE TO PRODUCE AND IMPLEMENT MORE LASTING AGREEMENTS.

B. END OF SOCIAL CONTRACT? THE CONSENSUS CONSIDERED THE SOCIAL CONTRACT A DYING OR DEAD LETTER, JUDGING BY THE TOTAL CAPITULATION TO WORKER DEMANDS AND THE WAVE DEFECT ON ASSOCIATED WAGES AND PRICES. FORD NEGOTIATIONS HAD ADMINISTERED A MAJOR BLOW; THE CURRENT SPATE OF SCOTTISH UNOFFICIAL STRIKES (23) WOULD CRIPPLE THE CONTRACT HERE. THE LABOUR MAY HAVE WON THE ELECTORAL BATTLE BUT NOW HAD A WAR ON THEIR HANDS IN SCOTLAND, LARGELY WITHIN THEIR OWN RANKS. SCOTS FOUND THEMSELVES CONFRONTED BY THE VERY CONFRONTATION THEY HAD HOPED TO AVOID BY VOTING LABOUR IN AND TORY OUT.

C. MORE, NOW. THE MAJOR FACTORS IN THE TIMING OF THE SCOTTISH OUTBREAK OF STRIKES HAD BEEN PRE-ELECTORAL RESTRAINT IMPOSED BY LABOUR FOLLOWED BY WORKERS' FEAR OF EVENTUAL WAGE FREEZE. OPINION FROM LEFT AND RIGHT CONVERGED ON THE INEVITABILITY OF A CONTAGION OF SIMILAR WAGE DEMANDS THROUGHOUT SCOTLAND AND ATTENDANT UNOFFICIAL STRIKES. IT SEEMED TO BE EVERYONE FOR HIMSELF; DE'IL TAKE THE HINDMOST.

D. WHY SCOTLAND? REPORTEDLY BECAUSE (1) SCOTTISH WAGES AND CONDITIONS ARE LOWER THAN IN ENGLAND, (11) PRICES ARE ESPECIALLY AIRBORNE DUE TO NORTH SEA BOOM, AND (111) EMPLOYERS CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE EXISTING EMPLOYEES. IT IS A WAGE-EARNER MARKET UP HERE.

E. WHERE'S LONDON? SCOTTISH PAPERS MAINTAINED A BARRAGE AGAINST LONDON AUTHORITIES FOR CHRONIC INDIFFERENCE. ANGLOPHILES THOUGHT IT WAS BOREDOM WITH STRIKES; ANGLOPHOBES THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE RETRIBUTION: LET SCOTS STEW IN THEIR OWN JUICE. THE DIFFERENCE IN PRESS COVERAGE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE BORDER ATTRACTED ATTENTION, E.G. OFF-HAND ECONOMIST-TIMES COVERAGE VERSUS SHRILL SCOTSMAN-HERALD DOOMSDAY HEADLINES. SCOTTISH POLITICIANS OF ALL COLORS, E.G. TAM DALYELL (LABOUR), JOE GRIMOND (LIBERAL), ALEXANDER FLETCHER (TORY), AND ALL KNOWN SNP'S GOT ONTO THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT BANDWAGON FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES. HOWEVER, NEITHER THE TUC NOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CBI WANTED LONDON TO INTERFERE, OR SO THEY TOLD ME.

F. PUBLIC REACTION. WITHOUT THE MEDIA, THIS FOREIGN OBSERVER WOULD NEVER HAVE KNOWN THAT "100,000 JOBS WERE THREATENED THROUGHOUT SCOTLAND." NORTH SEA SUPPLIES WERE IN JEOPARDY, HOUSEWIVES WERE PANICKING, AND OUTBREAK OF CONTAGIOUS DISEASE IMMINENT IN GARBAGE-STREWN GLASGOW STREETS. TRUCK TRAFFIC SEEMED THE SAME AND GLASGOW

STREETS FAR CLEANER THAN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ANY DAY. JACK OF STUC WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE PRESS COVERAGE; GRANT (CBI) WAS HIGHLY PLEASED THAT PUBLIC PRESSURE WOULD STOP THE TRUCKERS STRIKE (SIC). BOTH AGREED THAT PUBLICITY OF SUCCESS WOULD TEMPT OTHERS.

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G. WHO'S IN THE WOODPILE? SOME OBSERVERS, BOTH THE MORE THOUGHTFUL AND THOUGHTLESS, SAW THE HAND OF THE EXTREME LEFT. NOTE WAS TAKEN OF THE SPEED, SKILL, ORGANIZATION AND EXECUTION OF THE TRUCKERS STRIKE WHICH MOVED EFFECTIVELY TO SEAL OFF THE TWO KEY CONTAINER TERMINALS AT GREENOCK AND GRANGEMOUTH. THE ANONYMITY OF THE STRIKE LEADERS SEEMED OMINOUS TO OTHERS. SOME CONSIDERED IT PLAUSIBLE FOR MARXISTS AND FELLOW TRAVELERS TO DESTROY THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, THE ECONOMY, AND TO THROW DOWN THE GAUNTLET TO WILSON. OTHERS SAW NATIONALISTS IN THE WOODPILE, CHIPPING AWAY AT THE LABOUR ELECTORAL VICTORY AND TIES WITH THE U.K., AND "INFILTRATING THE UNIONS." (BOTH JACK AND GRANT POOH-POOHED

THIS ALLEGATION.) PERHAPS IT WAS, HOWEVER, JUST SCOTS
IN THE WOODPILE, WITHOUT PARTICULAR POLITICAL COLORATION,
JUST ACTING INDEPENDENTLY LIKE SCOTS.

H. WINNERS-LOSERS. MANAGEMENT, UNIONS, AND
GOVERNMENT (LABOUR) APPEARED TO BE THE BIG LOSERS, AFTER
THE PUBLIC, OF COURSE. WINNER AND STILL CHAMP IS IN-
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FLATION. BUT ALSO MOST BELIEVE THE SNP HAS PICKED UP
STRENGTH AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE
CRISIS WHICH LONDON IS UNABLE TO HANDLE SATISFACTORILY.
LIKE WASHINGTON, THE GOVERNMENT IN LONDON IS DAMNED IF
THEY DO, AND DAMNED IF THEY DON'T. MANY SCOTS SEEM TO
THINK THEY COULDN'T DO WORSE, HANDLING THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.
THE UNITED KINGDOM, TO MORE AND MORE UP HERE, IS UN-
UNITED AND UNRAVELING, WHICH IS ONE WAY OF "RECONCILING
THE SPIRIT OF INDEPENDENCE WITH THE LOOSENING OF THE
STATUS QUO." MORE TOP SCOTS (AND ENGLISH) TELL ME THAT
LONDON WILL ALWAYS THINK AND ACT WITH TOO LITTLE, TOO
LATE AND THAT "WITHIN FOUR YEARS, SCOTLAND WILL BE
INDEPENDENT" (SIC). FUNKHOUSER.

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